

Inter-America

A MONTHLY THAT LINKS THE THOUGHT OF THE NEW WORLD



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THE BALM-CRICKET AND THE ANT

BY

MONTEIRO LOBATO

An old fable—how many old fables there are!—in a new garb—and the number and variety of garbs is seemingly inexhaustible—with a practical application to life, and, especially, to modern life with its universal emphasis on the material and its equally universal hunger and search for the immaterial, the ideal, the noble and the beautiful.—THE EDITOR.

THERE was a young balm-cricket of very brilliant coloring that was wont to chirp at the foot of an ant-hill. She¹ only stopped when she was tired; and then her diversion was to observe the laborious ants in their endless task of storing the hampers of Antborough.²

After a while, however, the good weather passed, and then came the fine rains of January. All the animals, huddled together, lay tucked away in their warrens, waiting until the frightful downpour should cease. The poor balm-cricket, shelterless in her withered crevice, decided to seek help of some one.

Hobbling along, with one wing dragging, she made her way to Antborough. She knocked.

Up came a shivering ant, swathed in a cotton kerchief.

"What do you wish?" she said, examining the crestfallen beggar, covered with mud, and coughing, coughing. . . .

"I came in search of shelter. The drizzle never stops, and I. . . ."

The ant eyed her over and over from head to foot, wrinkling her brow:

"And what were you about in the good weather, that you did not build a house of your own?"

The poor balm-cricket, shivering, replied, after a spell of coughing:

"I sang, you know quite well. . . ."

"Ahem! . . ." exclaimed the ant,

¹Of course the balm-cricket like the ant, introduced just below, had to be females, since, grammatically, *cigarra*, "balm-cricket," and *formiga*, "ant," are feminine.—THE EDITOR.

²Formigopolis (*formiga*, "ant," and the familiar *polis*, from the Greek *πόλις* "city") in the Portuguese original, a place name, made, doubtless, by the author.—THE EDITOR.

recollecting. "It was you then that sang in this dead tree while we were running back and forth storing the hampers."

"The very one; it was I. . . ."

"Come in then, little friend! Never shall we be able to forget the good hours your music afforded us. Your chirping entertained us and made our work light. We always thought how happy we were to have so charming a singer as a neighbor! Come in therefore, friend; here you have bed and board as long as the bad weather lasts."

The balm-cricket entered, stopped coughing and again became the singer of the shining sun and the blue sky; and throughout the whole rainy season she enlivened Antborough by the vibrations of her strident music.

Later, when the sun reappeared and the balm-cricket departed, all the young ants confessed, with sad longing, that it was the pleasantest rainy season they had ever spent.

THERE was, however, a bad ant that could not understand the balm-cricket, and she coldly drove her away from her door. This took place in Europe, in the middle of winter, when the snow covered the earth with its mantle of ice.

The balm-cricket, as was her wont, sang without ceasing throughout the livelong summer. When winter came, she found herself in need of everything, without a house to shelter her, and without as much as a bite to eat.

Desperate, she knocked at the ant's door and tried to borrow—borrow, mind you!—some miserable scraps of food. She would pay. She would pay, with loud oaths, for the food lent her, as soon as the weather would permit.

The ant, however, was a heartless usurer. Hence she became envious. As she herself could not sing, she hated the balm-cricket mortally, because she saw that she was loved by everybody.

"What did you do during the good weather?"

"I . . . I sang!"

"Sang? Then dance now!" and she closed the door in her face.

Result: the balm-cricket died there,

frozen to death; and when spring returned, the world wore a sadder aspect. It was that, in the symphony of things, it missed the strident note of that balm-cricket that had died as a result of the ant's miserliness. If the usurer had died instead, nobody would have missed her.

ARTISTS—poets, painters, musicians—are the balm-crickets of humanity.

